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ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SOVIET DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BERLIN CRISIS:
FEBRUARY 22-26

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CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Negotiations. There were no concrete developments during the past week relating to the substance of negotiations on Berlin and Germany. A Soviet diplomat in Washington reportedly stated in mid-February that the Thompson-Gromyko exchanges had apparently reached a "dead end", but that Khrushchev intended to unveil "new proposals" at the March Geneva disarmament meeting. The official deliberately implied the USSR had expected "quick concessions" from the US in the talks as a result of the Berlin air corridor incidents.

The communique of the Khrushchev-Ulbricht talks in Moscow February 26-27 stated merely that a "thorough exchange of opinions concerning the conclusion of the German peace treaty and the normalization of the situation in West Berlin" had taken place. No details were revealed other than the fact the USSR was extending additional economic assistance to the GDR, apparently in the form of commodity credits. The communique indicated no urgency with respect to the "German peace settlement" nor did it make any reference to timing. The text simply noted complete accord in the USSR and GDR positions "with respect to the problems connected with the German peace settlement and other current international problems." A relatively high-level array of Soviet officials took part in the discussions; on the German side, Ulbricht was accompanied only by Bruno Leuschner (former head of the State Planning Commission, now a member of the State Council); Otto Winzer, deputy Foreign Minister; and the GDR Ambassador to Moscow, Doessling.

February 26, the day the GDR-USSR talks began, the Soviet Union lodged protests with the US, Britain, and France on the application of the FRG customs law in West Berlin. The note paralleled the GDR's January 18 protests and demanded that the Allied powers prevent the "illegal" implementation of the law in West Berlin. No protest has as yet been made to the FRG.

Military Preparations and Demonstrations. Soviet flight activity in the Berlin air corridors continued intermittently throughout the week. Three Soviet planes flew in the south corridor, two in the north corridor February 21; two in the north corridor February 22; for both days flight plans were filed the evening before by the Soviet controller at the Berlin Air Safety Center (BASC). In contrast to Soviet practice in earlier flights, however, the planes

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flying February 22 did not adhere strictly to the times and altitudes given in their flight plans. After a hiatus of several days in flight activity, two Soviet planes again flew in the north and two in the south corridor February 27, and on February 28 there were four flights in the north corridor; flight plans for all aircraft had been filed the previous day. On all of the above occasions, allied aircraft flew at the times specified by the Soviets, and the Soviet controller voiced no warnings with respect to flight safety when initializing the various flight plans.

February 27, however, the Soviet controller at BASC protested to his British and US colleagues that a British commercial flight had not adhered to its scheduled altitude and that a US plane had utilized the same flight level pre-empted by the Soviets. He demanded that such actions cease as they affected air safety in the corridor.

A Soviet military delegation of some 250 officials ceremonially visited the Soviet War Memorial in West Berlin February 23 on the occasion of Soviet Army Day. The delegation entered and left West Berlin via the Friedrichstrasse crossing point.

Berlin and Germany. No changes in access procedure to or within Berlin occurred during the past week.

On February 26 the S-bahn bypass connecting suburban areas north of East Berlin with Schoenefeld airfield south of the city was placed in operation. The new rail line permits access to Schoenefeld from any part of the GDR without crossing West Berlin territory. All previous rail connection transited West Berlin for short distances.

Travellers from West Germany to East Berlin are now being asked to leave the interzonal trains at Griebnitzsee (just outside the West Berlin city limits) and continue to their destination via the Berlin outer railroad ring, thus completely avoiding West Berlin.

West German and Soviet bloc media reported extensively on Attorney General Robert Kennedy's visit to West Berlin, February 22-24, assessing his appearances there as evidence of the 'icy winds of cold war.' The reports generally stressed the US was apparently not interested in lessening world tensions or in "normalizing" the Berlin situation; in particular, critical attention centered on the Kennedy statements that US forces would remain in Berlin, that Berlin-FRG ties would be maintained, that US firms would establish offices in West Berlin, and that the US intended to honor its commitments to the Berliners. The Attorney General's flights to and from Berlin constituted, according to GDR commentators, "new provocations in the air corridors."

It has been reported that KLM intends to carry passengers to the GDR Leipzig Fair (opening March 5) by flying into East Germany via Prague. Other reports indicate the Yugoslav Travel Office has been forced to cancel the bulk of its reservations for the Leipzig Fair, allegedly because of a lack of Yugoslav interest in the fair.

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East German trade statistics for 1961 indicate the GDR's foreign trade turnover increased by only about one percent last year, a drastic drop from the rate of growth of previous years. Current information also indicates GDR plans for becoming economically independent of the FRG have had to be postponed because the USSR would be unable to fill the gaps in GDR requirements prior to 1963. Tentative plans for the Soviets to purchase West German imports for the GDR have also allegedly fallen through.

ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET INTENTIONS

The information available on the Ulbricht-Khrushchev talks is as yet too limited to permit any considered judgment as to their significance. However, the fact that the meetings took place immediately upon Khrushchev's return to Moscow would indicate that they took up matters of importance. The Soviet Union has evidently agreed to additional economic assistance for the GDR, but the restrained wording of the communique may imply that the aid is below what the GDR would have wished. Also carefully hedged are the communique's references to the question of a peace treaty and Berlin; the very vagueness of the phraseology may indicate Soviet intent to continue holding the peace treaty question in abeyance for the time being. However, too little is known about the talks as yet to permit a firm evaluation.

The presence of Leuschner on the GDR delegation was most likely linked primarily to the economic subjects under discussion. Wissner, being the only other significant participant with Ulbricht, may imply the talks also concentrated on the legal and diplomatic aspects of GDR relations with the non-bloc world. In any event, the absence of GDR officials usually linked with security matters would tend to argue against the imminence of any major moves against access or against the Allied rights.

While there is no firm evidence on the subject, it cannot be excluded that the Soviet protest on the FRG customs law foreshadow the institution of a GDR custom frontier at the East-West Berlin sector border. Such a move would probably be calculated by the Soviets to be a step of relatively low risk and would serve as a sop to the East Germans in the event action on a separate peace treaty is being postponed.

The constantly changing form of Soviet flight activity in the air corridors does not at this point appear designed to harass Allied traffic in the corridors directly but rather to establish a Soviet presence in the Allied flight area. Simultaneously, the Soviets are continuing to attempt to shift some of the procedural responsibility for flight safety on to the Allied side. However, there is to date no evidence the Soviets intend to push the flight safety issue far enough to endanger the continued functioning of BASC.

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